

A Guide for Disposal of Unused Medicines & Syringes/Sharps



*Protect Yourself and others,
Safe Options for
Home Needle and Medicine Disposal*

How to Dispose of Sharps/ Needles

Arapahoe County follows the state of Colorado guidelines for the disposal of sharps/needles. One method allows patients to place used needles/pen needles, lancets (sharps) in a household container such as a laundry detergent bottle, bleach bottle or other opaque sturdy plastic container with a screw-top lid. When that container is full, place it in your regular garbage – not recycling. Label the container “Do Not Recycle: Household Sharps.” in large letters. This alerts the sanitation worker. Place the container with the other garbage for collection, but do not place it in a garbage bag or in with the recycles. The container must stand alone.

Though this is still approved in the state of Colorado it is the least desirable way to dispose of used sharps. Please read the next section for other options you may try before disposing of your container in the household trash.

NEVER PLACE LOOSE NEEDLES AND SYRINGES IN THE TRASH!

Other Options for Proper Needle Disposal

Some communities offer collection sites that accept used needles.. These collection sites may be at:

- Local hospitals
- Doctors’ offices
- Health clinics
- Pharmacies
- Health departments
- Community organizations
- Police and fire departments
- Medical waste facilities

Don’t leave your needles at one of these places – make sure the site accepts them.

Read more: safeneedledisposal.org

Mail-in Collection: Preferred Method

Use a mail-in company with the U.S. Postal Service and Food and Drug Administration approval. A list of mail-back programs is provided in the Household Medical Waste Compliance Bulletin which can be found in the following website.

How to Dispose of Thermometers

Check the bulb of your thermometer and observe the color. If the bulb is silver, your thermometer likely contains mercury, unless it is clearly labeled "mercury free." Thermometers with colored bulbs and electronic thermometers do not contain mercury. Dispose of mercury-free thermometers with other garbage and household waste. Wear gloves to handle any broken glass or plastic.

Many local agencies offer collection/exchange programs for thermometers, manometers, and thermostats containing mercury. Contact your local hazardous waste collection agency to inquire about specific disposal procedures for mercury-containing thermometers. You may be instructed to transport or ship the thermometer to a mercury-recycling facility, or your community may offer free collection.

Read more:

[Mercury Release and Spills](#)

How to Dispose of Inhaler Pharmaceuticals

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises to review the label on your inhaler first. Older inhalers may contain chlorofluorocarbons (an environmental pollutant), while newer ones are more environmentally friendly.

Call your local trash and waste department to ask how to dispose of inhalers properly if you can't find the label. The FDA notes that you may be asked to recycle, throw away or take inhaler pharmaceuticals to a hazardous waste facility, depending on where you live and what type of inhaler you have.

Follow the disposal procedure recommended for your town and your type of inhaler. If you're throwing the inhaler in a trash bin, wrap it in a plastic bag along with food scraps or coffee grounds to discourage children from picking it out of the trash.

Read more: [How to Disposed of Unused Medicines](#)

Safe Disposal of Cancer Medications

You should never throw leftover chemotherapy in the trash or flush it down the toilet. Normally, you will not have extra oral chemotherapy because it is prescribed in the exact dosage and amount you need. However, if you do, return it to your doctor or nurse for disposal. Also, ask a member of your health care team ahead of time if the empty containers or any other chemotherapy waste needs to be returned to the doctor's office or treatment center for safe disposal.

If you have additional questions about disposing of unused or expired medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist how to proceed. You can also call the FDA at 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332).

*For further information, please contact the
Community Resources Section at
720-874-3750 or 720-874-4040*

